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RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: RELEASE OF ACTIVIST BUI KIM THANH

REF: A) HCMC 333; B) HCMC 232 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Land rights activist Bui Kim Thanh was released from a Dong Nai mental hospital on July 11 after receiving a clean bill of mental health. Thanh had been held for ten months for her involvement in the land rights movement and for her links with the dissident Democratic Party of Vietnam (reftels). We have been in direct contact with her and she reports that she is well and was not physically mistreated; however, while there are no restrictions on her activities, she will have to have monthly "check-ups." The decision to release Thanh appeared to come from the Communist Party, despite an initial threat to extend her hospitalization. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) As reported in reftels, HCMC land rights activist Bui Kim Thanh had been confined to Central Mental Hospital Number 2 in Bien Hoa City, Dong Nai Province, since November 2006, despite having no history or indication of mental illness. On July 11, she was finally released from the hospital and was escorted out by HCMC police, representatives from the city's Communist Party Committee and her husband. Thanh told Poloff on July 12 that, when leaving the hospital, she was handed an official discharge document concluding that her mental health is "stable," but also requiring that she undergo monthly checkups.

¶3. (SBU) Thanh said that her release came as a surprise, as she had recently received information from sympathetic hospital staff indicating that the police and the HCMC Party Committee planned to send her to another institution in Hanoi for a further three months of treatment. Thanh stated that although the hospital's Diagnosis Council had concluded in late June that she was "mentally normal," she believed that the Party's involvement had delayed her release.

¶4. (SBU) Dr. Nguyen Van Tho, Director of the Central Mental Hospital, confirmed that Thanh had completed her treatment but refused to comment on her current mental health status. Dr. Tho said that he was not part of the Diagnosis Council and would not comment further on the case.

¶5. (SBU) According to Thanh, she survived her confinement thanks to assistance from supportive hospital doctors and nurses who provided updates on information related to her case. Thanh pointed out that the hospital's Deputy Director was especially sympathetic and played a key role in the Diagnosis Council's findings. Thanh told us that apart from initial compulsory medication, she was not physically harmed. She noted, however, that she had lost approximately 30 pounds during her confinement, and attributed the weight loss to the stress associated with living with mental patients in a confined space.

¶6. (SBU) While at the mental facility, Thanh wrote at least two letters saying that she would stop her role as pro bono legal aid provider for the land rights movement and sever all links with the Democratic Party of Vietnam. She told us that she

intends to "keep silent" for a few months in order to protect her family members, who have been under tremendous pressure from the police since her admittance to the hospital. Although Thanh is not under administrative detention, she reported that police pressured one of her sons to quit his job to monitor her activities after her release.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The fact that Party Committee personnel escorted Thanh from the hospital shows that there was direct Party involvement in this case. During his June 27 farewell call on HCMC Party Secretary and Politburo member Le Thanh Hai, the outgoing Consul General had asked Hai to "use influence" to resolve this case. The unexpected discharge, apparently heavily influenced by the Party, is a positive development, but the reasoning behind the decision to release her at this time remains unclear. End comment.

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